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A Chapter of Pioneer History

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A CHAPTER OF PIONEER HISTORY.

BY EX-GOV. CYRUS C. CARPENTER.

(From The Upper Des Moines, Algona, Iowa.)

In 1854 a man by the name of John Haggard of Dubuque had taken a contract to sub-divide eight townships in Emmet, and the northern part of Kossuth counties. He made preparation for the work, with camping outfit, team, tent, etc., and somewhat late in the fall went upon the ground he was to survey. The fall rains had filled the sloughs, so that the work was difficult and confusing. For some days he worked and figured among the sloughs and ponds to get a start. In the meantime a large party of Indians came down from Minnesota and camped in the vicinity, and parties of them were daily visitors at his camp. They begged provisions and were a general annoyance, until between the sloughs, mosquitoes and the Indians, he became utterly disgusted with his contract, and finally left, and returning to Dubuque told the surveyor-general he desired to surrender the contract. Before the surrender of the contract was finally determined, Mr. Wm. J. Neely, inspector of United States surveys, who the summer before had visited Mr. Berry's camp while I was at work for him, advised him to hire me to go up and do the work for him. But he feared it might not be done right and he would have trouble. Mr. Neely, however, gave him such assurance as led him to determine to do so. Accordingly Mr. Neely wrote me inquiring if I would do the work for Mr. Haggard, provided he would send his outfit to Ft. Dodge with three or four hands, leaving me to fill up the force. I answered agreeing to do the work.

In compliance with this understanding, about the 1st of May, 1855, the team and camping outfit with three hands arrived at Fort Dodge. Mr. Lewis H. Smith, now an honored citizen of Algona, who had just come to Fort Dodge, and a younger brother of mine, R. E. Carpenter, also a recent ar-

rival, were hired to make up the party. We moved upon the ground and began the work. We, of course, had the usual experiences of frontier surveyors. The country was a wet and sloughy region. It seems to me now, as I have ridden over it since its improvements, that there has been a great change in its entire physical structure. The sloughs are not half so large and there are not as many of them. One of the annoyances of the surveyor, as it was a sore annoyance in every frontier home, were the mosquitoes. We would generally work until nearly dark and then find our way around the sloughs and through them to our camp. You can neither imagine, nor can I describe, the torment of the mosquito. The air would be literally thick with them. If we talked they would get into our mouths; they would fly into our eyes and ears; would cover our faces and hands, and not an inch of our bodies, unprotected by clothing, would escape them. In going to and from camp one of the chainmen would carry the chain and the other the pins, the mound builder would lead the pony, upon which were strapped the stakes, our lunch basket, the spade, and any clothing we did not need for the time being, so each of these people had one hand with which to fight mosquitoes. But the surveyor carried his compass on one arm and his Jacob-staff on his shoulder, held in place by the other hand, so he had no hand to fight these little torments and had to resolve to let them bite, and march on. At night we would close the tent air tight to prevent being annoyed by them.

Well, things went on without much change until one day we were at work in the vicinity of the point now known as Armstrong's grove, in the northern part of Kossuth county, when, it seemed instantaneously, the atmosphere became thick with smoke. The prairie, which had not been burned the fall before, all seemed to be on fire. The smoke absolutely prevented running a line more than a few steps at a time. In the midst of this an Indian came up to me and began to motion with his hands and fingers, I suppose to give me the idea of the number and location of the Indians. While he was going through with his gesticulations, Smith,

now Judge Smith of Algona, came up leading the pony, upon which were strapped the stakes, our coats, dinner pail, etc. The instant the pony caught sight of the Indian he reared back, jerked the strap from Smith's hand, and disappeared in the smoke. We found him the next day, however, and recovered our goods. The Indian, after vain efforts to talk with us, wrapped his blanket around his gun and strode away.

It was now quite late in the afternoon and we started for camp. We knew that our cook and camp-keeper would move during the day, with the purpose of pitching the tent near the center of the next township south, as we had hoped to finish the one upon which we were at work that day. We therefore walked in the direction of the point to which we supposed the camp would be moved, but knew we would not be able to see it in the smoke, unless we should come very near it. Night finally came on, and the horizon on every side was lurid with burning grass. We knew if our camp-keeper should build a fire to guide us into camp we could not distinguish it from the other fires on every hand. To add to our difficulties, Mr. Smith and my brother were both quite unwell. We travelled, however, until near 12 o'clock, when we found ourselves in low ground and concluded we might have passed our camp and instead of getting nearer to it might be going away from it. So we lay down in the grass and smoke to rest until daylight. Our coats were strapped to the pony and the night was chilly. It was a hard night.

The next morning we found ourselves in a bottom near the Des Moines and on looking off to the south, about three-fourths of a mile, we saw our tent. Our cook fairly leaped for joy when we came into camp. He had known the night before we would be confused by the fires, so he had built a fire on a knoll and ran around it for hours hoping we would see him. He was a noble, faithful young man. Well, this was Sunday, and of course we spent the day in camp. Before night we found it a fortunate circumstance that we were all there. About 10 o'clock we discovered coming from the northeast and steering southwest, in the direction of the

west fork of the Des Moines, a long procession of Indians. The squaws were leading ponies to which were attached tents, tent-poles, papposes and all the paraphernalia of an Indian camp. They passed about half a mile west of us. When opposite our camp some thirty or forty of the Indian men turned off and came to our tent. They gathered around the tent, some of them went inside, and others peered into it and around it from the outside. They asked for food. I motioned to them that we had to stay three or four moons, and had only enough to last, and that we could not get more nearer than Mankato, Minnesota, or Fort Dodge. Then they asked for tobacco, of which we had a pretty good supply, and gave them enough to fill their pipes. They sat for a while and smoked and talked among themselves. Finally they got up and began to walk around and through the tent and handle various things. We had a couple of sacks of flour and two of the boys had spread a blanket over them and taken a seat on them. One of the boys spread a blanket over our sack of beans and our sugar and coffee and had taken a seat upon them. On the outside of the tent we had a barrel about half full of pickled pork. They gathered around this, took off the cover, looked in, and finally one reached down and took out of the brine a good sized piece of pork and put it under his blanket. I knew if we permitted him to keep it that it would be a signal for them to take more, and all. We could talk among ourselves without their understanding what we said, and we agreed that the only way to protect our camp from robbery was to put on a bold front, and if necessary defend ourselves as best we could. So when the Indian had put the pork under his blanket, I walked up to him, took it out, threw it into the barrel and put the lid on. Another one picked up a tin cup and acted as if he proposed to keep it. I took it away from him and threw it into the tent. Then a young buck picked up a bell which we had to put on one of the horses when they were out grazing. He buckled the strap around his leg and walked slowly away, while the whole contingent set up a loud guffaw. We agreed that they were testing our patience

and courage. I therefore seized a section stake and followed him a few rods from the tent, confronted him with the stake in hand, pushed him back towards the tent, and motioned him to unbuckle the strap. He looked at me with a most surly scowl for half a minute, and I looked him in the eye. He finally unbuckled it and threw the bell toward the tent, and I gave him a push from it. I then walked back to the tent and stood among them, assuming as much as possible an air of indifference in regard to them. They finally began to talk among themselves, and then asked for tobacco. We gave them tobacco to fill their pipes, and, after they had lighted them and taken a few whiffs, they marched off.

During all this performance with the red scoundrels it never occurred to me that our lives were in danger. My only anxiety was to protect our food and property, as I thought they intended to rob us. But two years after this when I learned of the Indian massacre at Spirit Lake, in which undoubtedly a part of these savages were engaged, I thought of that Sunday on the prairie and was thoroughly scared.

GOOD NEWS FROM GENERAL DODGE.—We learn from the operator in this city, that Major General Dodge is at Nashville. It is confidently believed that his wound is not fatal. He was able himself to send a telegram from Nashville to his family in Council Bluffs. It will be a glorious thing for this country if General Dodge shall get up squarely on his feet in good time to assist in winding up the campaign of this year. His death would unquestionably be a great blow to his family and personal friends, but it would be an infinitely greater blow to his country.—*Iowa State Register*, Aug. 28, 1864.

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